

**A Book Review: *Identity*****By Joseph Shaules, Hiroko Tsujioka, and Miyuki Iida, 2004, 73 pp.****ISBN 780194385749****Reviewed by Erin Dwinnells, Asia University**

*Identity*, by Joseph Shaules, Hiroko Tsujioka, and Miyuki Iida, is a textbook that encourages cultural learning and understanding “through discussion, presentation, and writing activities” (p. iv). The book is divided into 12 units, each of which focus on a different aspect of culture and cultural identity. Each unit provides the learner with up to 10 words that will be utilized in the reading or listening section of the unit, as well as a supplemental audio CD with the listening track for each unit. My experience with this book began in 2016 when I first utilized it in my AUAP-IR class at Asia University, and continued into the 2017-2018 academic year. This paper will first provide some background on the utilization of this textbook in my AUAP-IR classroom. This will be followed by a description of the textbook. Finally, I will conclude by highlighting the strengths and weaknesses of this textbook in the EFL classroom before providing my final opinion on the textbook in my conclusion.

### **Description of *Identity***

*Identity* (Shaules, Tsujioka, & Iida, 2004) is published by Oxford University Press. Each *Identity* package includes a student book, teacher's manual, and an audio CD. The textbook also includes transcripts of each listening section in the back of the book from pages 50-61, as well as a glossary of words from pages 62-67. According to the authors, the book was created with the intent to introduce English language learners to cultural ideals, norms, traditions, and communication styles around the world. The book does not focus on a particular culture, but instead it introduces the learner to a variety of cultures spanning all continents. "To communicate well with others," write Shaules, Tsujioka, and Ida (2004), "you need to have confidence to use English to talk more deeply about yourself. *Identity* gives you this practice through discussion, presentation, and writing activities" (p. iv).

The textbook consists of 12 units, and each unit spans 4 pages. Each unit has a different topic: topics include values (Unit 2), body language and customs (Unit 5), and gender and culture (Unit 9). Each unit contributes to the book's overall theme of cultural identity.

Each unit begins with a "Find Out" reading section with corresponding comprehension questions. A single reading passage is usually about 1 to 3 paragraphs, and features a different writer for each unit. For example, the Unit 1 writer is a Japanese student named Rumi, while Unit 10 has 3 different writers: Rajiv from India, Theresa from Australia, and Min-Jin from Korea. The passage addresses the topic of the unit, and also introduces about 5 new vocabulary words. The passage's comprehension questions are located directly after the reading, and answers to the questions are found sequentially within the reading.

The "Speak Out" pair work section is located after the "Find Out" reading and is intended as pair work. Tasks vary from unit to unit, but usually include a "question and answer" format. For example, the unit 9 topic covers the topic of "Gender and Culture," and so the "Speak Out" section asks, "Do you think it's good for women to stay at home" (p. 34) and so forth. Pairs should take turns questioning and answering each other.

Next, the "Focus In" section provides a questionnaire regarding students' opinions on the given topic. The questionnaires are often 6 questions set up in a format which allows students to circle the answer that best describes the student's opinion. For example, the first question in Unit 9 "Focus In" asks, "Do you think mothers are better parents than fathers?" and provides the

options “Yes,” “no,” and “I’m not sure” (p. 35). The following questionnaire is another “Speak Out” section, but this time the pair work focuses on the answers from the “Focus In” survey. Students should take turns asking each other the questionnaire questions to elicit a response, and the partner should answer and elaborate on his/her answer. For example, a student should answer the survey question, “Do you think mothers are better parents than fathers?” (p. 35) with a yes or no answer and reasoning.

Following the “Focus In” Section is “Listen In,” a section in which students listen to a short recording and answer two sets of questions about the dialogue. Question formats vary from unit to unit, but examples include the following: true or false, listen and write the answer, or put the events in order. Because the two sets of questions are divided, students should listen to the recording at least twice. The “Listen In” section is also followed by a “Speak Out” section in which pairs should answer questions regarding the listening. Prompts for this section are more varied than previous “Speak Out” sections, and include such directions as giving advice to a partner (Unit 8) or asking about stereotypes for a certain country (Unit 10).

The final section of the textbook, a reading section entitled “Find Out More” is usually about a famous man or woman who is or was an expert on the Unit’s topic. Unit 9 on “Gender and Culture,” for example, features famous cultural anthropologist Margaret Mead, while Unit 12 on “Global Community” features Mahatma Gandhi. The “Find out More” section is once again followed by a “Speak Out” section related to the “Find Out More” reading.

*Identity* also contains a “Wrap Up” section for each unit located in the back of the textbook between pages 68-73. These sections usually involve a short presentation or class discussion. Students are given example questions to help them brainstorm ideas, and the instructions encourage students to use the ideas or vocabulary from the corresponding unit.

### **Discussion of *Identity***

#### **Strengths of *Identity***

I utilized *Identity* at Asia University in my AUAP classes from 2016-2018, and during that time found many strengths of the textbook including organized units, relevant topics good for extending into additional work, useful and fun surveys, useful wrap up activities, and the textbook works well with students from different countries.

First, *Identity* is very organized and easy for students to follow. The format remains the same for each chapter, and the units are not overly congested with text or pictures. Also the format of “Find Out,” “Focus In,” “Listen In,” “Find Out More” sections in each chapter allows students to quickly become familiar with and comfortable with the textbook so that they can utilize class time efficiently and effectively. Asia University’s AUAP classes are 90 minutes once per week, and students easily finished one unit per week after they familiarized themselves with the text’s simple and well-organized units.

The textbook also contains numerous relevant topics for the students, all of whom are required by their department to complete the AUAP (study abroad) course in lieu of studying abroad in the United States. Topics such as “Gender and Culture,” “Diversity,” and Body Language” allow students to consider the customs and cultural norms of cultures that may be unfamiliar to them. Students particularly enjoy Unit 5 on “Body Language and Customs,” as well as Unit 10 on “Diversity.” Each of the topics seems natural, relevant, and easy to understand for the students, even if the topic is not part of their culture. Additionally, the topics lend themselves very well to extended work; for example, it is quite easy to find additional materials on such topics as “Communication Styles” (Unit 8), “Culture Shock” (Unit 3), and “Diversity” (Unit 10).

Additionally, students were engaged in the “Focus In” section surveys, as they are easy to understand and encourage students to share opinions. These surveys were the most popular sections of the textbook, and I often extended the surveys by adding my own questions.

Next, the textbook contains very well constructed and easy to use follow up activities for each unit. The directions for the activities are very short, which allows the instructor to make the guidelines for these activities as detailed as he or she desires. For example, many of the unit “Wrap Up” activities simply instruct the students to prepare a short presentation. If the class quickly finished the unit, I required more detail from these presentations including pictures, sources, etc. If the students needed more time with the unit, then I used these “Wrap Up” activities as discussion prompts to end the class. The instructor may even chose to turn them into extended projects with a grading rubric. For example, the “Wrap Up” from Unit 10 (“Diversity”) instructs students to give a presentation about a region in their country. I turned this into a multi-class project in which students gave a poster presentation and a written report. Students had to answer the questions provided in the “Wrap Up” section in their presentations, as well as utilize one outside source in their research.

Finally, the textbook works well with students from different countries. My AUAP classes had students from Japan, China, Nepal, and Myanmar, and none of these students struggled with the concepts presented in the textbook. In fact, my class's diversity allowed students to share the knowledge, customs, and traditions from their culture, and often this made for a more enjoyable and interesting learning experience. For example, my students from abroad could share their culture shock experiences during Unit 3 while my Japanese students could teach these students the meaning behind different customs during Unit 5.

### **Weaknesses of *Identity***

Despite its many strengths, *Identity* does exhibit a few weaknesses including the text does not build on previous units; the textbook does not provide testing materials; and the text is lacking in visual materials such as supplemental videos.

First, the topics explored within *Identity* do not build on previous topics, which makes the information very arbitrary. For example, Unit 8 covers "Communication Styles," but the next unit covers "Gender and Culture." The text may benefit from overarching units with different chapters relating to the same theme, rather than 12 units with no relation to each other. For example, the authors could choose to devote a unit to gender, then include topics such as "Communication Styles," "Diversity," and "Social Change" all under the umbrella of gender. This would give the book more cohesion, as well as allow for the repetition of vocabulary and themes. It would also be beneficial for testing purposes, as it may be easier to test on one large unit rather than 12 small units.

Next, the textbook does not provide any testing or scoring materials, nor does it give any instruction on the best way to test students. I made my own short quizzes each week on the precious week's unit, or I scored students based on their presentations from the "Wrap Up" section. I sometimes also provided students with graded worksheets to complete during the "Find Out More" reading section. It would be beneficial for later editions of the text to include a grading rubric for the "Wrap Up" presentations, or to divide the text into larger units with corresponding exams.

Finally, *Identity* could benefit from visual materials such as an accompanying video for each unit. While the reading and listening sections are informative, I often found myself searching for supplemental videos related to the topics. Students enjoyed watching these videos,

and I usually created a worksheet to be completed as the students watched. For “Body Language and Customs” (Unit 5), for example, I showed students a video from YouTube about Koko the gorilla, a famous primate who can use sign language to communicate. Later editions of *Identity* would greatly benefit from a supplemental DVD, or even links to useful videos on the internet.

### **Conclusion**

Overall, *Identity* is an excellent textbook to help improve cultural awareness and understanding in English learners of all levels. The textbook’s topics are relevant, interesting, and easy to understand. The book is also well organized and easy to follow, so that students are neither overwhelmed nor distracted during the class. Moreover, the textbook allows for a wide array of supplemental lessons and activities, and the “Wrap Up” sections provide an excellent opportunity for presentations or pair work. I highly recommend *Identity* as a resource for cultural learning focused classes in the ESL/EFL classroom.

## References

Shaules, J., Tsujioka, H., & Iida, M. (2004). *Identity*. New York: Oxford University Press.